



CONFERENCE OF INGOs  
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

## **Action Plan of the Conference of INGOs June 2015 - January 2018**

*adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 25 June 2015  
and updated on 29 January 2016*

### **General considerations**

Four years have gone past since the reform of the Conference of INGOs [CONF/REFORM(2011)1], [CONF/REFORM(2011)2], which took place in the more general context of the reform of the Council of Europe. In view of the geopolitical situation and institutional factors both within and outside the Council of Europe, specific expectations have now been expressed with regard to the Conference of INGOs by the members themselves and by the other Council of Europe bodies. It is therefore essential that we confirm a number of practices that have already been put in place and organise our activities to increase their impact within the Council of Europe and in member states. With this in mind, the Conference of INGOs, as the collective expression of organised civil society and a Council of Europe body, must be close to the grassroots and represent the general interests of civil society while preserving its independence, which is a very specific aspect of the Conference.

With reference to:

- The Resolution of the Committee of Ministers CM/Res(2003)8 on participatory status for INGOs with the Council of Europe;
- The Resolution of the Committee of Ministers CM/Res(2003)9 on the status of partnership between the Council of Europe and national NGOs (;
- the document of the Secretary General SG/Inf(2014)23 on the Role and Functioning of Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the Council of Europe;
- the second report by the Secretary General [SG(2015)1] on the “State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Europe - A shared responsibility for democratic security in Europe”;

This Action Plan is supplemented by the Action Plans of the thematic committees and the Gender Equality Expert:

[Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee Action Plan](#)

[Education and Culture Committee Action Plan](#)

[Human Rights Committee Action Plan](#)

[Gender Equality Expert Action Plan](#)

as well as the road map for the Youth participation.

## Priorities and strategic aims

- Commitment to the indivisibility of human rights;
- Protecting human rights defenders;
- Combatting radicalisation and the types of extremism that lead to terrorism;
- Promoting gender equality;
- Freedom of assembly and association and the creation of an environment that is favourable to the functioning of NGOs in Council of Europe member states;
- Democratic governance through increased participation by civil society in decision-making procedures at local, national and European levels;
- Combating discrimination and violence against vulnerable persons and groups;
- Active citizenship in an inclusive society;
- Migration: challenges and consequences;
- Governance and territorial aspects of democracy.

## Strategic objectives

With a view to increasing the impact of our activities in these strategic fields, we, the Conference of INGOs, set ourselves the following strategic objectives:

### *External:*

- To increase the complementarity of our activities (by carefully selecting themes, target groups, methods of approach, etc.) with those of the other Council of Europe bodies;
- To establish dialogue with those concerned when the decisions and policy directions chosen by governments and intergovernmental institutions constitute a threat to the universality and indivisibility of human rights, democracy and the rule of law;
- To enhance civil society's participation in the decision-making process at local, national and European level so as to expand the democratic space in Council of Europe member states and in Belarus;
- To intensify interaction between national NGOs in order to increase the relevance and legitimacy of networking between INGOs and national NGOs.
- To do everything possible to promote the ratification and application of Council of Europe legal instruments by member states;
- To co-operate with NGOs in countries neighbouring Council of Europe;
- To step up the Conference of INGOs' collaboration with the INGOs represented in the European Union and the UN and with specific bodies attached to these institutions.

### *Internal:*

- To foster interaction among the INGO members of the Conference;
- To develop cross-cutting activities between the thematic committees in the priority fields presented above;
- To strengthen the cross-cutting aspect of gender equality in each of the thematic committees;

- To improve the co-ordination of the work carried out by the working groups and promote their visibility and dissemination;
- To enhance the role of the Expert Council on NGO law as the Conference watchdog;
- To foster the participation of young members of our INGOs in the Conference sessions;
- To lend an ear to young people's concerns and strengthen their participation in the work of the thematic committees;
- To foster participation in our activities by people who have little to do with the European institutions.

### **Working methods**

#### ***Outside the Council of Europe:***

To organise:

- Fact-finding visits to Council of Europe member states (see presentation in the appendix);
- Strategic discussions between the Conference and the representatives of the other Council of Europe bodies or other intergovernmental institutions;
- Events targeting the general public in conjunction with the INGO members of the Conference and INGOs represented in the European Union and the UN ;
- *Side-events* with the participation of representatives of the institutions and of organised civil society;
- Advocacy in favour of the Conference and the Council of Europe priorities;
- Training sessions in priority areas to enhance the capacity of INGOs and national NGOs to promote the implementation of the Council of Europe's legal instruments.

#### ***Within the Council of Europe:***

- To hold strategic discussions between the decision-making bodies of the Conference and the INGO members on the priority areas of the Conference and the themes on the agenda of the other Council of Europe bodies; To engage the Chairs of the thematic committees of the Conference, with the support of the Secretariat, to organise the discussions of the working groups in accordance with the latest topics of interest and the priority areas identified by the Conference and the other Council of Europe bodies;
- To produce short memorandums and written reports accompanied by a summary;
- To adopt resolutions and recommendations addressed to the INGOs, the other Council of Europe bodies and to member states and to transmit relevant information to the Secretary General and the other Council of Europe bodies.

### **Co-ordination**

- The Chairs of the thematic committees, Standing Committee and the Bureau will be responsible for co-ordinating activities under the aegis of the President, in conjunction with the Secretariat.
- The Bureau will prepare evaluation tools for monitoring the implementation of this Action Plan.

## **Internal and external communication**

A specific action plan has been drawn up to improve internal communication and the visibility of the activities and work carried out by the Conference. The first stage in this plan proposes a homogeneous and coherent communication strategy for the Conference of INGOs and that a project team be set up to manage this communication plan.

A Conference Facebook page and a Twitter account have been re-launched and are regularly supplied with information. The thematic committees are encouraged to use these information channels and social networks. The Bureau members in collaboration with other members of the Standing Committee will be responsible for co-ordination.

The Conference will have a new website on the Council of Europe portal. Consequently:

- At the end of each session, the Chairs of the thematic committees will send short memorandums (flash info format) to the Secretariat for publication on the Conference website and on the social networks;
- Greater visibility will be given to the work carried out by the working groups after approval by the Chairs of the thematic committees and the Standing Committee.
- To maximise the impact of their activities, the INGO members of the Conference are invited to transmit relevant information on the priority areas and strategic objectives to the decision-making bodies of the Conference (Standing Committee and Bureau) and to the Secretariat.

## Documents appended to the Action Plan for the Conference of INGOs June 2015 – January 2018

### Fact-finding visits by the Conference of INGOs Terms of reference

#### Prior considerations

Civil society's participation in the decision-making process is one of the priorities mentioned in the second report of the Secretary General du Council of Europe on the "*State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Europe - A shared responsibility for democratic security in Europe*" [SG(2015)1]. On page 11 of this document, the Secretary General says that "In a number of states, the formal mechanisms by which civil society groups are consulted are superficial and ineffective. In the worst cases, governments have attempted to control legitimate citizen initiatives."

For many years the participation of organised civil society in the decision-making process has been one of the priorities of the Conference of INGOs. In 2009, the Conference drew up and adopted the **Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process**. This document, which has been translated into 20 languages, received the support of the Committee of Ministers (Declaration of 21 October 2009 at the 1068<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ministers' Deputies), the Parliamentary Assembly [AS / Pol (2009) 14] and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities [Opinion 31 (2009)]. The Congress' recent report entitled "*Partnership between local and regional authorities and civil society to encourage active citizenship and participation*" [CG/CUR/2015(27)11] confirmed the value of this document and underlined the need to update its content by associating it with the ordinary practices of local governance in member states.

**The INGO Dialogue Toolkit** is the second example of a reference tool prepared by the Conference of INGOs. The use of this tool has proved to be relevant among other things in building social cohesion and the human rights based approach regarding diversity issues. Freedom of assembly and association, an issue which is equally important for civil society, is now being undermined. The Secretary General notes in his report that "a number of recent government decisions have provoked serious concerns with regard to the legal status and protection of a number of NGOs in some countries in Europe." (page 54).

In January 2008, the Conference set up the **Expert Council on NGO Law** for the purpose of promoting an environment in which NGOs can function in Council of Europe member states and Belarus.

The fact-finding visits carried out by the Conference of INGOs will involve members who take part in the above-mentioned activities so as to support the initiative of the Secretary General aimed at developing new guidelines on civil society's effective and meaningful participation in the political decision-making process.

Such visits will contribute to the Conference's expert knowledge on the participative practices of national NGOs. The Conference of INGOs will inform the national NGOs of the legal activities and instruments developed by the Conference of INGOs and the Council of Europe and will collect information on the participative practices established in the countries visited.

Without superseding the information and dissemination work done by the INGO members of the Conference, the exchange between national NGOs and the Conference will enhance the relevance and legitimacy of the networked activities of INGOs and national NGOs. The visits will contribute to identifying innovative NGO practices and obstacles NGOs encounter in the course of their daily work. The aim of such meetings will be to strengthen dialogue between organised civil society at local and national level and the public authorities. The results of this work will not provide the basis for any decisions but will provide contributions to the debates held by political decision-makers and by the Council of Europe bodies.

The visits will take place one or twice a year. The choice of countries to be visited will be approved by the Standing Committee of the Conference of INGOs and the information gathered will be forwarded to the Permanent Delegations of the countries concerned. The members of the Conference will be asked to transmit information on the action being carried out by their national members in the countries concerned. In the country itself, meetings with the public authorities will be held either together or separately from those held with the NGOs. A month or two after the visit, the delegation shall present its report at the plenary session of the Conference. It will then be sent to the Permanent Delegations of the countries visited for comment. The government's point of view will be included in the report but it will be presented separately from the Conference' analysis of the situation. An opinion may be sought from an expert who does not belong to the Conference. The final document will be forwarded to the Secretary General and to the other Council of Europe bodies.

The first visit, which may take place in autumn 2015, will demonstrate the relevance of this activity. The countries suggested for the next visit are: Bulgaria, Moldova and Romania.

## **Road map for the Youth participation**

### **Adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 29 January 2016**

#### **1. Background/Context**

The ideas developed within the ad hoc discussion group with a view to making the “youth” dimension more operational in the Conference (coordination : Anne Kraus) were validated by the Standing Committee on 28 September 2015 who requested this road map.

#### **2. General considerations**

The Conference of INGOs, as the collective expression of organised civil society and a Council of Europe body, must be close to the grassroots and represent the general interests of civil society *as a whole*, including young people. The strategic objectives adopted by the Conference in June 2015 provide for us “to increase the complementarity of our activities with those of the other Council of Europe bodies, to lend an ear to young people’s concerns and strengthen their participation in the work of the thematic committees and working groups, and to foster the participation of young members of our INGOs in the Conference sessions.”

Some of the priority areas of action adopted by the Conference in June 2015 concern young people directly:

- Combating discrimination against vulnerable groups;
- Active citizenship in an inclusive society;
- Migration and territorial aspects of democracy;
- Young people involved in combating radicalisation and the types of extremism that lead to terrorism

#### **3. Definition of objectives**

##### **3.1 Main objective**

**Develop a new *Youth* approach with Conference of INGOs added value, “Make a difference!”**

Step up the Conference of INGOs’ engagement with young people *of different sensibilities* and thereby develop an approach specific to the Conference of INGOs aimed at different types of young people, taking care not to exclude those who are not already represented in representative institutions and youth organisations (“non-institutionalised young people”).

Without copying what others already do and while publicising the Conference of INGOs and its added value, create a space for dialogue and make it possible to build bridges between young

people of different sensibilities. Encourage the presence of young people during the Conference's sessions so as to build an intergenerational body and an open, innovative and modern forum for debate and stance-taking.

Define and communicate the value added by the Conference of INGOs in terms of incorporating the Council of Europe's objectives in the dialogue with young people – "MAKE A DIFFERENCE!"

### 3.2 Intermediate objectives

- a) Inform young people about the Conference's role and work and the topics it discusses and enable them to understand the benefit of expressing their concerns and opinions through:
  - the creation of communication nodes;
  - new operating methods;
  - discussion methods suited to current needs;
- b) Obtain information which will enable us to address the activities of the committees more effectively (cross-cutting approach);
- c) Develop the interest of member INGOs in the cause of young people by listening to their ideas and concerns (discrimination, access to social rights, access to employment, data protection and migration, etc.).
- d) Encourage and facilitate the role of young people of different sensitivities as democratic players within civil society in general and enable young people to contribute to the work of the Conference of INGOs. Enable them to express their views/present their cause in our plenary ("Step aside") and be heard.

*(Young people expend their energy in places where they feel useful and recognised, wherever they believe that the "action" corresponds to their interests!)*
- e) Promote co-operation between young people of different sensitivities through formal and informal exchanges, in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding.
- f) Gather opinions and proposals for action concerning the priority issues agreed by the committees and the Standing Committee (Action Plan 2015-2018).

## 4. Main lines of action proposed

The various objectives can be pursued simultaneously and gradually:

- Maintain and step up the links with the Council of Europe's youth sector, with the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) and the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ);

- Take part in the activities and projects which are of major interest for the Conference, for instance, the World Forum for Democracy and the training courses run by the Council of Europe's youth sector at the European Youth Centre, etc;
- Participation by the Conference in the No Hate Speech Movement Alliance
- Cross-cutting co-ordination of projects with each of the Conference's committees:
  - Human Rights;
  - Education and Culture;
  - Democracy and Social Challenges;  
and the Gender Equality Expert;
- Participation in existing youth projects;
- Discussion of the profile of young people receiving support from social workers and those who are in institutional care, excluded, have disabilities, are exceptionally gifted or are activists, etc. (gradual establishment of contact with the NGOs/associations concerned);
- Step up ties with youth INGOs, the European Youth Forum and any associations sharing the Conference of INGOs' values;
- Holding of formal and informal exchanges and events (during and outside sessions) to enable young people ("institutionalised" and "non-institutionalised") to meet the members of the Conference of INGOs.

Ongoing assessment of progress and adjustment of the steps to be taken.

## **5. Proposed organisational arrangements**

Anne Kraus (Bureau) will be responsible for overseeing the progress of the work. She will develop the project in accordance with the objectives and lines of action approved by the September Standing Committee meeting.

She will initiate new "communication nodes" and propose methods of action and discussion/reflection methods suited to needs.

She may be assisted by representatives of member INGOs which wish to take part in the process of making the youth dimension more operational and in teamwork.

## **6. Next stages**

- Implementation of activities for 2016-2017
- Ongoing assessment and reporting on progress at the Standing Committee meetings
- Adjustment/agreement of objectives for 2018